

In Stanley Kunitz’s “End of Summer,” the speaker conveys his epiphanic and fearful realization of his loss of youth and approaching death through dark imagery and powerful language. The first stanza of the poem expresses the abrupt change from summer to fall:

An agitation of the air,  
A perturbation of the light  
Admonished me the unloved year  
Would turn on its hinge that night (1-4).

The rhythmic consonance of the words “agitation” and “perturbation” echoes the turbulent emotion of the change of seasons. Furthermore, the speaker describes how the air’s agitation metaphorically admonishes him for the “unloved year.” This admonition suggests that the speaker has not spent his year in love or kindness, and more generally, has not lived a life filled with these virtues. He continues by describing his condition in a “disenchanted field” (5), where a “small worm” (7) lisps to him the “song of [his] marrow-bones” (8). The worm symbolizes his old age or death, a theme that is further emphasized by the worm’s song of “marrow-bones,” which likely refers to speaker’s deteriorating physicality. The speaker is disenchanted because he has reached a point in his life in which he has lost his youth. Perhaps the most important stanza of the poem is the final one, in which his summer ultimately ends:

Already the iron door of the north  
Clangs open: birds, leaves, snows

Order their populations forth,

And a cruel wind blows. (13-16)

These four lines eloquently and metaphorically represent the beginning of the new season; the “iron door of the north” (13) opens, giving way to the birds, leaves, and snows that are an inherent part of fall and winter, and the speaker ends with the powerful line: “And a cruel wind blows” (16). This line marks the sad and sudden awareness of the end of his youth, the cruel beginning of his old age, and the approach of his death. Through powerful imagery, language, and metaphor, Stanley Kunitz in his “End of Summer” demonstrates the intrinsically dark and fearful realization of one’s ultimate old age and death, and he reminds the reader of the evanescence of innocence and youth.